

# **Exhibit 6**

*MARION  
AND OTHER STORIES*

Emma Cline

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## MARION

Cars the color of melons and tangerines sizzled in cul-de-sac driveways. Dogs lay belly up and heaving in the shade. It was cooler in the hills, where Marion's family lived. Everyone who stayed at their ranch was some relative, Marion said, blood or otherwise, and she called everyone brother or sister.

The main house jutted up from the ranch land, as serene and solitary as a ship, crusted with delicate Victorian detailing that gathered dirt in its cornices and spirals. The first owner had been a date heiress, Marion told me, adored and indulged, and her girlish fancies were evident in the oval windows that opened inwards, the drained pond that had once been thick with water lilies and exotic fish. Palm fronds fell crisped from the trees that flanked the house's exterior. All the landscaping was now like an afterimage, long grown over but visible in the heights of grass, in the lines of trees that extended a path to the front door, bordered by white plaster columns.

We spent most our time in the airy rooms of the main house. We watched the babies there, cradled them and sang, dangled glass beads on strings over their damp faces. We put together whatever puzzles were around, baroque castles, or glossy kittens in baskets, starting over as soon as we had finished. I found a book on massage, with fold-out graphs of pressure points, and we practiced: Marion lying on her stomach, her



shirt pushed up, me straddling her and moving my hands across her back in firm circles, my palms slick and yellowed with oil. Marion had just turned thirteen. I was eleven.

My mother was going through a phase then, having night sweats and blackouts. She paid people to touch her: her naturopath, who placed warm fingers on her neck, her breast; the Chinese acupuncturist, who scraped her naked body with a plane of polished wood. I ended up at Marion's for weeks at a time, my clothes mixed in with hers, her half-brother stealing small bills from me, her father, Bobby, kissing Marion and me good-night square on the mouth.

One afternoon, we sat on the front steps of the main house, sharing a root beer and watching her father dig pits in the yard. Later, he would line them with leaves and fill them with apples.

"I need cigarettes," Marion moaned, passing me the bottle. I sipped the root beer with adult weariness. "Let's ask Jack for some," she said, not looking at me. Jack was Bobby's friend, visiting from Portland. He was rangy, the pale hairs on his arms neon against his tanned skin. He had been staying in the barn with his girlfriend Grady, who wore long skirts and ribbons around her ponytail. At dinner, when Grady lifted her arms to retie her bow, I saw dark hair under her arms and averted my eyes.

"It's not like it's a big deal. He'll share," Marion said, pinching a thread from the hem of her cutoffs. Marion was wearing her shorts over her favorite bright-orange bikini, nubby fabric stretched tight across her breasts, her shoulders shining from sunscreen. I was wearing a swimsuit top too, borrowed from Marion, and all day I had felt an anxious thrill from the strange feeling of air on my chest and my stomach. Marion raised her

eyebrows at me when I didn't answer. "We're wearing these cause it's hot, okay? Don't worry so much."

Marion knew she was something pretty in that suit. Men stared at her, and she liked it. When Jack first came for dinner at the ranch, he would follow Marion with his eyes when she got up from the table. That day, when Jack watched Marion in the barn as he rolled a cigarette for her, I felt a flint of heat in my insides. When he glanced at me, I turned and hunched my shoulders, trying to relieve the strain of my breasts against the borrowed fabric. I never went out in that swimsuit again.

None of us knew then that bark beetles were tunneling in the trees, laying millions of eggs that would wipe out millions of trees. Bobby was warning of an attack so great that the United States would fold in on itself like a fist. It was the men's job to protect the women. Everyone who lived at the ranch was storing things, freezing food in huge, unbelievable quantities and clearing brush out of old Indian caves and caching water there in jugs. Bobby wanted to build a stone tower, forty feet high and circular, on top of a hill where the energy was paramagnetic and auspicious. They circled the site with silk flags and burning oils before they started construction. Marion and I watched from the hillside, slapping the mosquitoes on our legs. He was storing arms, Bobby said, for the wars, and we never quite knew if he was joking or not. Marion rolled her eyes at him all the time, but swallowed the foul-tasting coptis tincture he gave us each morning for regular bowel movements and thick hair. "Like a pony's," he said, and twisted Marion's braid around his wrist.



Her family staked their marijuana plants on south-facing hillsides and planted them with sage and basil. They told their friends they had thirty plants, but they had five times that many, hidden all over the ranch. They sold to a dispensary in Los Angeles, and sometimes if my mother was away for the weekend on an extreme juice fast, Marion and I were allowed to drive down with Bobby when he dropped it off. Marion's mother, Dinah, taught us to use a vacuum sealer on the plastic around the dope.

"Put on gloves," Dinah said, tossing me an old gardening pair. "If you guys get pulled over they'll sniff your fingernails for resin."

We triple-bagged the weed and packed it into backpacks. Dinah put the backpacks into big duffel bags and covered them with beach towels, swimsuits, folding chairs and a crate of overripe pears to hide whatever smell was left. Marion and I piled into the backseat, holding hands, our bare thighs sticking and skidding on the leather seats. We drove along the winding coastal roads, through shantytowns and orchards that drooped in the heat, past dry hills and that distant purple ridge, the cows standing motionless in the middle of a field.

I had been down south before, but my mother and I had driven on I-5, not the back roads. My mother would never have stopped at the rock shop, where Bobby let us each buy a piece of agate, or the date farm, where an old man made the three of us milkshakes. They were thick and I sucked at the straw until my mouth ached. Marion finished hers first, then rattled the straw around in her empty cup. She rolled down the window, got my attention, and let the cup tip and fall out of the car. When I looked back, the cup was bouncing silently into the weeds.



"Hey," Bobby said, turning half around in his seat. He swatted at Marion but she swung her legs out of reach. "Don't do that," he said. I was smiling, like Marion, but when Bobby's voice rose, I stopped. "Don't toss shit out of the car when it's full of pot," he bellowed, slapping his hand toward Marion. His hand glanced off her bare thigh and I saw it redden. "You wanna get us pulled over for something stupid?" he said, turning back to the road.

"God," Marion cried, rubbing her leg. "That hurt."

Bobby wiped his hands on the steering wheel. He glanced back at me in the rearview and I looked away.

"They just love to get you for stupid shit like that."

I smiled when Marion looked at me. She wrinkled up her face, jokey again, but I saw her grip her agate.

I held my own agate up to the light of the car window. It was smooth, a pale blue, banded with delicate threads of white. The woman at the rock shop said it was for grace, for flight. "Good for protection," she said, when I brought it to the counter. "Blue lace agate can help you call on angels. Also heal eczema, you know, if you get dry skin."

The agate Marion picked out wasn't smooth. It was jagged and bright. The flame agate, the woman called it. "See?" the woman said, lifting it, turning it in her fingers.

"Looks like a coal, huh? Like a hot coal."

"What's it gonna do for me?" Marion asked, reaching out to touch it.

"Well, it's good for night vision," the woman said. "Addiction too, but you're young for that. You know what?" she said, looking at Marion. "It's just a good earth stone. For power."

"They're all like that," Marion said. "All protective, all powerful, blah." She grinned at the woman. "Are there any bad stones?" she said. "Like, that give you weakness or stupidity or something?"

"Yeah, or cancer," I ventured, rewarded by Marion's quick snort.

The woman shook her head. She looked at me as if she was disappointed, and I looked away. The woman handed Marion and me little silk pouches. "Don't leave them in direct sunlight," she'd said as we left. "Drains their power."

When we stopped to get gas, I watched Bobby at the pump, pulling uncomfortably at his waistband. I realized that it was one of the first times I'd seen him wearing clothes that looked like what other adults wore; instead of his jeans he wore with no shirt, now he was dressed in athletic pants made of a shiny material, and borrowed sneakers. He stood stiffly, arms crossed over the sports logo on his T-shirt.

In the backseat Marion was tossing her agate from palm to palm. "Sorry dad yelled," she said. "It's just tense. The drive."

"It's fine," I said. "Really. I don't care."

"He can be a jerk," Marion shrugged, and concentrated hard on catching the agate.

"Yeah."

Marion stopped. "He's really great too," she said, narrowing her eyes. "He's a really great father," she said. We both looked up: Bobby snapped the wipers out of the way and started dragging a squeegee wetly on the windshield. Through the water and soap, the road beyond was blurry and far-off.

"I don't think he's a jerk." I lowered my voice. Bobby was bunching up paper towels. "I would never think that."

We heard the high squeak of glass. Bobby had scraped the last of the water away, and the world outside the car was clear again; the clapboard of the small convenience store, the propane tanks, the highway, near and empty and without end.

Bobby dropped the weed off at a Japanese temple in Burbank. While the men did business, Marion and I flicked murky water at each other and watched the goldfish in the driveway fountain gape and flash in the sun.

"There are no rules," Jack said, back at the ranch. He showed us anything we wanted in the barn, let us pick up mouse bones, old tops. Potted garlands of bulbed plants, sweet succulents we pierced with our fingernails.

"Don't feel like you have to ask to touch anything," he said. He let us look through pulpy books with black-and-white photographs of dead bodies, of bloody sheets.

"Oof. That's Manson," he said, twirling his fingers. "I knew Beau before he hooked up with them. He wrote poems. Sweet bad poems."

From Jack we learned about runes, about the Ku Klux Klan. That men who wore rings on their thumbs were liars. When Jack excused himself to the outhouse, Marion rummaged through Grady's underwear in the bureau.

"Don't look through her stuff," I said. I liked Grady.



"He said we could touch anything," Marion said. "Whoa," she crowed, holding up a pair of black lace underwear. She stuck her fingers through a slit in the crotch and wriggled them. "Crotchless panties," she laughed, and flung them at me.

"Gross," I said. When I tossed the underwear back to Marion, I saw her shove them deep into her back pocket. She looked at me, daring me to say something, then moved on to the *Playboys*, turning each page, discussing the women.

"This one's real skinny, but her tits are big. Like me. Men love that."

Another page, a tawny woman with an Indian cast to her face. Then the cartoons, somehow more lurid than the photographs; the bursting shirts and rounded rears, the unzipped fly.

A thirteen-year old girl. We talked about that a lot, what the girl might have looked like, how Roman Polanski knew her, how it had happened. Did she have breasts? Did she have her period yet? We were jealous, imagining a boyfriend who wanted you so bad he broke the law. We were drifting through whole weeks, making bonfires at night, eating twenty popsicles in a row and burying the flimsy plastic wrappers all over the yard. We made a game of hiding the wrappers—rolling them into balls and wedging them in the crotches of trees, folding them into the pages of Jack's old almanacs and religious encyclopedias. We sat in the back of Bobby's pickup as he drove the gridded vineyards and released wrappers from our clenched fists like birds.

Marion was my first real friend. I never had the framed photos that girls like to give each other. I had never worn friendship bracelets, or even hated anyone else with

another girl. My life seemed like something new and unasked for, Marion smiling at me in the sunshine, letting me wear her woven ankle bracelet for days at a time, braiding my hair that had grown colorless and thick, full of dust and the peculiar smell of heat. Bobby walked around wearing a sarong low on his hips, and sometimes naked, the skin on his penis mottled and pale, and so none of the other girls in the seventh grade class were allowed to visit, but Marion liked it like that. She pierced my ears one night with a needle, holding a piece of cold white apple behind my lobe, and there was hardly any blood at all. She helped me trace the outline of my face in lipstick on the bathroom mirror, so we could determine my face shape (heart) and the most flattering haircut (bangs, which she cut with Dinah's nail scissors). Her hot breath, blowing the small cut hairs out of my eyes.

We spent more and more time at the barn. Marion said that it didn't make sense to wait until a trip to town for cigarettes, or a mentholated pastille, when Jack would give us both for free. Marion would stare at him while he typed at his desk, on a computer he ran with extension cords to the main house, and we passed whole afternoons looking through his shelves, murmuring amongst ourselves, sitting Indian-style on the floor. Marion smiled at him with an intensity that made her look almost cruel. I tried to smile that same way.

Marion leaned up against his desk, and told him about the boy who had a seizure and shat himself at the community pool. "The mommies got all the kids out of the water real quick after that," she said, and waited for Jack to laugh.



Marion had told me to watch him and tell her later if I thought he liked her. So I hung back, fingering the rows of books and geodes, spooning cold tomato soup into my mouth from a mug. I took note when Jack looked at the door or at Marion's slim thighs in cutoffs.

Marion started volunteering to deliver messages from Grady in the kitchen to Jack in the barn, or ice cream sandwiches in the peak hours of heat. I wondered if he could feel us watching him.

I never told Marion about the time I saw Grady and Jack naked, stretched out side by side on a picnic table in the yard. "We're charging ourselves." Grady laughed, her eyes closed. "By moonlight." Dark hair spread across her thighs and up her stomach like a sleeping animal. Jack smiled lazily, his hand on her.

Marion borrowed Dinah's old Instamatic and took me up into the hills, where she stripped and had me take pictures of her naked body laid out on rocks. "You'll be good at this, I know it," she said. She tied a red ribbon around her throat like she had seen on one of the girls in *Playboy*. She closed her eyes, opened her mouth, and put her fingers on her flushed chest. I thought she looked really great, but she also looked dead. When we pulled the film out of the camera, letting it dry in the sun, some faint blue shadows spread on her chest and throat.

Marion tucked the photos into a box with a twenty dollar bill, and she cut off a piece of her hair to put in there too, tied with the red ribbon. She said that was what Jack would want, that she could tell he was courtly and would understand the significance of it. She said her father had told her how hair and teeth had tightly wound cellular



structures that held power. A tooth would be better, she said, and she opened her jaw wide and let me look inside her pink mouth. She pointed at a tooth on the top row, said it was loose anyways and that she'd been working on it, tonguing it to make it even looser, pressing it as hard as she could stand with her fingers. It would be out soon, she said, and she would give it to Jack and he would know for sure.

We daubed vitamin E oil in swaths under our eyes, so that a pale glossy light caught and shone there. We looked like bright-eyed lemurs in the bathroom mirror.

"We're staying away for a few days," Marion said, looking at herself, running a finger around her lips, across the swell of them. I knew she was thinking how beautiful the curve of her mouth was, because I was thinking it too. "You keep men on their toes. You make them miss you."

We planned our return to the barn; what bras we would wear, what we would say. Marion had written Jack's name on her body, on the bottoms of her feet where the ink slid into the whorls. I saw it all when we changed for bed.

The women were drying branches of lemon verbena and sage on tin sheets all over the yard, and a puppy Jack had dragged home from town kept nosing the sheets over. Marion was reading *Archie Double Digest* with her back against a rock wall, and I was pressing tiny sequins onto my nails with glue. The day was hot and I kept dropping the silver discs into the dirt. Marion picked a scab on her upper arm, put it in her mouth, chewed it for a while, then spat it out.

"That's disgusting."

"You're disgusting," she said, turning the page. "Fuck, they don't do anything but buy hot dogs and keep girls away from Archie."

The heat of the day lay on the grass like a blanket. I tried to get the puppy's attention, but some kids were tugging at it.

"Who do you think is prettier?" Marion asked, looking thoughtfully at her comic.

"Betty. I don't know. She's nicer."

"She looks too old. She dresses like your mother. Which do you think Jack would like?"

"Both," I said. I had a sequin poised over my nail but was watching Marion to see if she'd laugh. She stood up suddenly.

"Let's take photos today," she said. "I need to get them in the box."

We pedaled the old bicycles, bouncing roughly over gravel and ruts in the path. I carried the camera on my shoulder. Marion stood up on her pedals, her legs tan, flexing. We coasted to the lake, the water thrumming with dots of flies, scrimps of algae ringing the banks.

"Let's make these good," Marion said, briskly.

"You should do whatever and I'll take the picture."

"No," she said, breaking up a clot of weeds with a stick and looking back at the main house. "You should be in them today."

I took off my clothes and folded them neatly on the bank. Marion put my hands on top of my head, and pulled strands of hair down in my eyes. She wedged a finger delicately between my teeth to show me how far to keep them parted.



"You look good," Marion said, her face hidden by the camera. She was taking pictures from far away, squatting in the dirt.

"You look young, really great."

Then she came close with the camera, so close she touched the lens to the tip of my nipple, then cackled and collapsed on the grass.

"It's hard," she gasped.

I started to step into my cutoffs but Marion leapt up and came toward me. She threw her arms around my neck, loose like a child, and kissed me with her eyes open.

"It's ok," she said. "Pretend I'm Jack. Look sleepy. Look sexy. Try to look like I do." We were breathing hard. "Get my tooth out," she said.

She pointed to the jagged-edged thing in her mouth that moved when she touched it.

"Do it with your hands," she urged.

Marion was smiling. Both of us were, like idiots. I tried but couldn't get a grip. Marion drew my fingers farther into her mouth. I was delirious. She picked up a rock and put it in my hands.

"Do it," she slurred, then took my fingers out of her mouth. Her hand was shaking. "Just hit it once, hard."

I looked at her; the witchy colors of twilight on her face, her eyes gone filmy and blank. Her mouth gaped, blood already threading out from the tooth.

"Just do it," she breathed.

I lifted the rock and gave a tap. "Wait," she said, recoiling. She took a deep breath. She opened her mouth, then, so I could hook my fingers on her jaw. I tapped the



tooth again. "Nnnh," she said, but I hit harder, and felt it give. The blood made a sudden sheet of red down Marion's chin. She just stood there, stunned, cupping her mouth with her hands and looking at me with something I would later identify as hatred.

By the time I was dressed, Marion was pedaling away.

When I got back to the house, she wasn't there. The puppy shuffled its nose against my foot. Bobby walked past with sheets of gray felt in his arms.

I knew enough not to look for her. I went instead to the main house, to the kitchen, where it was cool and dim and they had the radio playing. Dinah was cooking and Grady was milking a clear white liquid from plant stalks, pulsing her fingers along the stems. They were both flushed and generous, touching me affectionately as they passed. Grady motioned for me to come sit by her.

"You and Marion should be rubbing this on your faces twice a day," Grady told me. "You'll never get wrinkles, ever."

I smiled at them both, beaming when Grady applied the plant liquid in gentle, thorough circles under my eyes, around my mouth, between my brows. Dinah picked through beans, shuffled the wizened ones to the side, finding the hidden rot, while I sat at the counter and cut up some tomatoes from the garden. They had sunscald, their skin tight, and underneath was the hum of warm weight. I broke them open and the seeds dripped out over my hands.

Marion never showed up for dinner. I drifted off by myself, napping in the trundle bed I shared with Marion, in my underpants under the coolness of her sheets. I woke blinking and startled in the evening light. Dinah was downstairs, calling my name.

When I went into the kitchen to find her, Dinah cornered me. She grabbed me by the arm and pulled me toward her.

"Marion said you kissed her. She said you hit her." She was crying and shaking. I thought of the woman sorting the beans, the sun in her hair, and how different she looked now.

"Marion showed me her mouth. You stupid little girl."

Grady came in behind Dinah, and turned on the kitchen lights—the sudden illumination was worse, somehow, than the dark. Grady looked upset. I tried moving my shoulders but Dinah held them tight.

"You think this is normal?"

She shook a picture of Marion at me, the one of her with a ribbon around her throat and her legs spread open. I covered my mouth with my hands, but Dinah had seen me smile. She shoved her face hard against mine, so her mouth was in my hair. "I know," she said, into my ear. "Don't think I don't know who this was for."

Grady hefted my denim backpack into the bed of the pickup and bent down next to me in the passenger seat. "Don't worry," she said, but her voice was strained. "Just give it a few days. It'll be fine."

Dinah came out of the house, one of Bobby's old sweaters wrapped around her. She and Grady talked to Bobby while I sat with my head back against the seat, looking out at the yellow grasses. The fields were hazy with buckwheat and it was almost Fall



again. How had we missed the buckwheat? How had we not seen the smear of it in the hills?

"Just tell her mama we need a break for a while," Dinah said. "Just say we're going through some family stuff."

"Her mother's never around."

"Just say, I don't know, something. I don't care," Dinah said.

I saw Dinah stalk off in the side mirror, and Bobby got into the truck and started it without saying anything. I watched the lights of the main house recede behind us, the barn rising darkly against the sky, then disappearing. My face was wet, and I was hiccupping, but I didn't feel like I was crying. I couldn't tell why my forehead was wet too, my ears, where the water was coming from. Bobby was breathing hard, looking straight ahead as we drove the bumpy ranch roads.

"Marion's a stupid girl. You can't fuck around with teeth. She's too old. It won't grow back. I know what she was doing, and it doesn't work if you have a rotten heart. They're connected to your brain, too, your teeth, how you process pain, how you remember. Feel your teeth, how far up in your head they go?"

I ran my tongue across my gums.

"All calcium," he said.

He put his hand on my back and rubbed my bare skin up and down.

"And this, what you have here—we all used to be fish. Your spine's what's left of those aquatic skeletons."

I closed my eyes, imagining horrible fish swimming through murky, primordial waters. He told me then how the symbols were gathering around him, how it had to do



with me coming into their lives, with the dreams he had of the floors of his childhood home covered with white figs, with the number of times he had found a dead deer on the ranch. His bees were disappearing, entire colonies collapsing for no reason. He found them in piles, their furred legs covered with dust and pollen. He could feel it, he said, a thrumming in the trees and all around, could feel that things were falling apart from the inside. Tonight confirmed it. He told me I shouldn't worry, that I was a light-holder and that things would be fine and that I would have to stay away for a little while. Marion would call me soon, he said. We could be friends again, but I knew it wasn't true.

"You're a sweet girl," he said, his hand on my shoulder. "You're better than all of them."

## *THE BLEACHERS*

Julian pushed the door where the asphalt ended, and he and Sara sat for a moment

in the soft clarity of a series of windblown things deep in an apple orchard. There were a row of

small windblown things, a row of small things, and the back of a windblown

"That one I like for you" Julian said, pointing at a small one with a peaked roof. Her

lightest in Sara's hair, something is behind her ears, and she leaned into his chest.

"Sara, Sara" he said, and she had all the wet, warm, together, as Sara liked

and she was looking at the faded golden willows against that Pacific gray. She

looked at the golden willows. "All in?"

"I want the large in the car for now."

They walked to the parking and to the first building, a wooden cube with sliding

glass doors crowded with ragged violence and sun damage. Off the porch were half

hundred growing gray stalks of hair and the rattling heads of winter leaves, while a white

stone made of gilly flowers, shells hung over the steps. As they approached the door, two

great dogs, big as bears, hunched heavily at their chairs. Sara stepped to put one of the

back of the jaw, and the dog whined in pleasure, milky eyes going strong.

Then, both looked up as the glass door inched open, it was Julian, Julian's cousin,

smiling, the door with his face. His arms full of magazines.

Julian parked the truck where the asphalt ended, and he and Sara sat for a moment in the cab, staring at a series of outbuildings deep in an apple orchard. There was a row of metal trashcans by a rotting plank fence, and the burned-out husk of a woodstove.

"That one'll be for us," Julian said, pointing at a studio with a peaked roof. His hand fell to Sara's hair, smoothing it behind her ears, and she leaned into his chest.

"Looks nice." It was true; the land had all the wet sewn-togetherness Sara liked most about Northern California, the flayed golden willows against cool Pacific grays. She butted a little against Julian. "All in?"

"Leave the bags in the car for now."

They walked in the sucking mud to the first building, a wooden cube with sliding glass doors clouded with trapped moisture and sun damage. Off the porch were half barrels growing gray stalks of kale and the swampy fronds of winter leeks, while a wind chime made of oily abalone shells hung over the steps. As they approached the door, two white dogs, big as bears, lurched heavily at their chains. Sara stooped to pet one at the root of its jaw, and the dog whined in pleasure, milky eyes going sleepy.

They both looked up as the glass door inched open; it was Major, Julian's cousin, nudging the door with his foot, his arms full of magazines.



"Julian," he said, ignoring Sara. "Nice to see you man. Give a hand with these?"

It was strange for Sara to watch Julian with his cousin; he was quieter, deferential with Major in a way he'd never been with her. Major was older than Julian, or seemed so anyways, stronger and more compact with the dark brow of a simian, thick-knobbed knuckles brushing the worn fabric of his work pants.

Julian didn't look like he was even related to Major. If anything, Julian looked more like Sara's kin; the same nose with its delicate bridge, Julian's head of curls as bright and lovely as a woman's. Julian was even dressed like her, Sara realized, in slim cut jeans and a grey t-shirt with a loose neckline.

When Major finally turned and shook Sara's hand, still holding a pile of magazines and awkwardly extending his left hand, she immediately felt the press of his wedding ring. She couldn't remember if Julian had mentioned a wife.

Major was cleaning out the study, he said, making quotation marks around the word study. "We use it to listen to CD's," he said, "watch movies. You heard of Netflix?"

Julian nodded and Sara smiled, kindly she hoped, and shoved her hands in her pockets as they followed Major further into the house.

The house was an old spa, he said. "The Healing Oasis," Major snickered. Shut down because of health-code violations. The central structure was thin-walled, cheaply made and mostly empty in the main rooms; a blonde wood futon couch with sun-bleached cushions and a stained pressboard armoire. The backyard was pitted with four different pools, all drained, the concrete faded with calcium stains up the sides. One pool was a perfect square, rimmed with a cedar deck. "Watsu," Major muttered. "You know what's down the street? Earthtopia. I shit you not. A bunch of guys hoping girls will

come to their dome and get naked. That's your dad's kind of bag, isn't it?" he said, turning to Julian. "Hippies and shit?"

"Oh," Julian said. "Ha—yeah, I guess so."

"You know that joke about hippies?" Sara said, speaking for the first time.

Major shook his head.

"Hippies are proof cowboys fuck sheep," Sara said, and watched him laugh.

They'd driven up from Los Angeles in a borrowed truck to build an installation on Major's land. Sara had gotten a grant from a foundation that supported emerging artists. She'd almost missed the application deadline, but at the last minute she'd come up with this piece, a set of wooden bleachers built onto a hillside.

Bleachers, she'd written in her proposal, representing viewership of nature, rural commodification. She'd put on an academic voice, reading out loud to Julian in the bedroom of his house. Outside was the lushness of Silverlake, the humid rim of the reservoir.

"My project," Sara said, clearing her throat, "is a way of exploring the landscape of memory. Nature," she said, "as a site of consumption, as an urban repository."

"Repository for what?" Julian asked, lying back against the pillows.

"Nature as a repository for desires. Projection."

"Who's going to build these bleachers?"

Sara had smiled crookedly and lifted the hem of her shirt so the pale undersides of her breasts showed.